

ARE THE MODERN VERSIONS BASED ON WESTCOTT-HORT?

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The theories of textual criticism which underlie the Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament of 1881 have been somewhat discredited by textual critics of the 20th century. It is not surprising, therefore, that modern version proponents today often disassociate themselves from Westcott-Hort and claim that they merely use an “eclectic” Greek text. (“Eclectic” means to “select or employ individual elements from a variety of sources, systems, or styles.”)

James White, author of the popular and influential book “The King James Only Controversy,” makes this claim. He says, “While modern Greek texts are not identical to that created by Westcott and Hort, one will still find defenders of the AV drawing in black and white, saying that all modern versions are based upon their work” (White, p. 99).

I have heard other modern version defenders imply that Westcott and Hort are irrelevant to the subject of the biblical text because “no textual critic now holds to the Westcott and Hort theories of textual criticism.”

This position DODGES THE REAL ISSUE, WHICH IS THE FACT THAT WESTCOTT AND HORT REPRESENTED THE SIGNAL DEPARTURE FROM THE RECEIVED TEXT THAT IS REPRESENTED TODAY IN THE POPULAR THEORIES OF TEXTUAL CRITICISM. Westcott and Hort built upon the foundation established by their predecessors, such as Griesbach, Lachmann, and Tischendorf. Westcott and Hort adapted the textual theories of these men into their own unique blend, and their Greek New Testament represented the first popular departure from the Greek Received Text.

While today’s textual scholars do not always admit that they follow Westcott and Hort, many of the more honest ones do admit that they are powerfully influenced by these men.

Bruce Metzger is probably the most influential textual critic alive. He is one of the editors of the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament and the author of many widely used books on textual criticism. In his 1981 book *The Westcott and Hort Greek New Testament--Yesterday and Today*, Metzger makes the following plain admission: “The International committee that produced the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament, NOT ONLY ADOPTED THE WESTCOTT AND HORT EDITION AS ITS BASIC TEXT, BUT FOLLOWED THEIR METHODOLOGY IN GIVING ATTENTION TO BOTH EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL CONSIDERATION” (Metzger, cited by James Brooks, *Bible Interpreters of the 20th Century*, p. 264).

In light of this admission by such a prominent textual authority, James White needs to explain for his readers why he condemns King James Bible defenders for claiming that Westcott-Hort are still followed.

Brooks further states, “There is nothing unique about Metzger’s theory of textual criticism. It is simply a refinement of Westcott and Hort’s theory in the New Testament in the Original Greek (1881). . . . this theory is dominant today in part because of Metzger’s great influence. It was the theory employed in producing the United Bible Societies Greek text. It is the theory lying behind the Greek text used by most modern versions: The Revised Standard, the New Revised Standard, the New English Bible, the Revised English Bible, the New American Bible, the New American Standard, the Good News Bible, the New International Version, and to a lesser extent, also the Jerusalem Bible and the New Jerusalem Bible” (Ibid.).

This should be enough to demonstrate our point, but we offer more.

In 1962 Kenneth Clark observed: "...the Westcott-Hort text has become today our *textus receptus*. We have been freed from the one only to become captivated by the other. ... The psychological chains so recently broken from our fathers have again been forged upon us, even more strongly. ... Even the textual specialist finds it difficult to break the habit of evaluating every witness by the norm of this current *textus receptus*. HIS MIND MAY HAVE REJECTED THE WESTCOTT-HORT TERM 'NEUTRAL,' BUT HIS TECHNICAL PROCEDURE STILL REFLECTS THE GENERAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE TEXT. ... Psychologically it is now difficult to approach the textual problem with free and independent mind" (Clark, "Today's Problems with the Critical Text of the New Testament," *Transitions in Biblical Scholarship*, edited by J.C.R. Rylaarsdam, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp. 158-160).

In 1964, Jacob Greenlee stated, "THE TEXTUAL THEORY OF W-H UNDERLIES VIRTUALLY ALL SUBSEQUENT WORK IN NT TEXTUAL CRITICISM" (Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964, p. 76).

Consider the following quotation by Ernest Cadman Colwell, a textual scholar who published a number of widely used grammars and textbooks, including *A Beginners Reader-Grammar for New Testament Greek* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), *A Greek Papyrus Reader, with Vocabulary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), *A Hellenistic Greek Reader* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), and *Studies in Methodology in Textual Criticism of the New Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969).

"THE DEAD HAND OF FENTON JOHN ANTHONY HORT LIES HEAVY UPON US. In the early years of this century Kirsopp Lake described Hort's work as a failure, though a glorious one. But HORT DID NOT FAIL TO REACH HIS MAJOR GOAL. HE DETHRONED THE *TEXTUS RECEPTUS*. ... **Hort's success in this task and the cogency of his tightly reasoned theory shaped—AND STILL SHAPES—the thinking of those who approach the textual criticism of the NT through the English language**" (emphasis added) (Ernest Cadman Colwell, "Scribal Habits in Early Papyri: A Study in the Corruption of the Text," *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. J.P. Hyatt, New York: Abingdon Press, 1965, p. 370).

In the introduction to the 24th edition of Nestle's Greek New Testament, editors Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland make the following admission:

"Thus THE TEXT, BUILT UP ON THE WORK OF THE 19TH CENTURY, HAS REMAINED AS A WHOLE UNCHANGED, particularly since the research of recent years has not yet led to the establishment of a generally acknowledged N.T. text" (Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 24th edition, 1960, p. 62).

James White is failing to acknowledge a fact that modern textual authorities such as Metzger, Colwell, and Nestle do acknowledge--that Westcott and Hort are key, pivotal men in the modern history of textual criticism and that the current "eclectic" Greek New Testaments continue to reflect, for the most part, the decisions made by Westcott and Hort. To deny their influence is similar to denying the influence of Darwin on contemporary evolutionary thought. Many planks of Darwin's theories have been discredited, but Darwin and his theories are important because of their key, pivotal role in the field.

Consider another quote, this one from Dr. Zane Hodges:

"MODERN TEXTUAL CRITICISM IS PSYCHOLOGICALLY 'ADDICTED' TO WESTCOTT AND HORT. Westcott and Hort, in turn, were rationalists in their approach to the textual problem in the New Testament and employed techniques within which rationalism and every other kind of bias are free to operate. The result of it all is a methodological quagmire where objective controls on the conclusions of critics are nearly nonexistent. It goes without saying that no Bible-believing Christian who is willing to extend the implications of his faith to textual matters can have the slightest

grounds for confidence in contemporary critical texts" (emphasis added) (Zane C. Hodges, "Rationalism and Contemporary New Testament Textual Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, January 1971, p. 35).

Zane Hodges is not a fundamental Baptist, but I believe he is more honest about the influence of Westcott and Hort upon modern textual scholarship than James White.

White and others attempting to discredit the defense of the King James Bible claim that Westcott and Hort are not important because (they say) "the modern versions (NASV and NIV) are not based on the Alexandrian text or on the Westcott and Hort text. They are based on an eclectic text which sometimes favors the TR over Aleph or B."

This is true as far as it goes, but it ignores the heart of the issue. The fact is that the United Bible Societies (UBS) text is almost identical to the W-H text of 1881 IN SIGNIFICANT DEPARTURES FROM THE RECEIVED TEXT.

For example, both the W-H and the UBS delete or question almost the same number of verses (WH--48, UBS--45).

Both delete almost the same number of significant portions of verses (WH--193, UBS 185).

Both delete almost the same number of names and titles of the Lord (WH--221, UBS--212).

An extensive comparison of the TR against the WH text, the Nestle's Text, the UBS text, and key English versions was done by the late Everett Fowler and can be found in his book *Evaluating Versions of the New Testament*, available from Bible for Today.

The W-H text of 1881 and the latest edition of the United Bible Societies' text differ only in relatively minor points. BOTH REPRESENT THE SAME TYPE OF TEXT WITH THE SAME TYPE OF DEPARTURES FROM THE RECEIVED TEXT. They follow the type of text found in the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, which the Reformation era Greek editors believed was a doctrinally corrupt text that was modified during the theological battles occurring in the two centuries after the apostles.

The fact is that the Westcott-Hort text represents the first widely-accepted departure from the Received Text in the post-Reformation era, and the modern English versions descend directly from the W-H text. The Westcott-Hort Greek text is very significant and its editors are highly significant to the history of textual criticism. Any man who discounts the continuing significance of Westcott-Hort in the field of Bible texts and versions is probably trying to throw up a smoke screen to hide something.

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